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STATE FOR WHA/CEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [CH](#) [TW](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: HONDURAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS VICE MINISTER ON VICE
PRESIDENT BIDEN'S CENTRAL AMERICA VISIT, DOMESTIC POLITICS
AND RELATIONS WITH IRAN AND CHINA

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 215 (B) TEGUCIGALPA 210 (C)
TEGUCIGALPA 128

Classified By: AMBASSADOR HUGO LLORENS, REASONS: 1.5(b and d)

11. (C) Summary. Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Eduardo Rosales raised Honduran participation in the San Jose Central American meeting with Vice-President Biden, President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya's desire to have a referendum on holding a constituent assembly to reform the constitution, and Honduran plans for expanding foreign relations in a meeting with the DCM. Rosales argued that Zelaya's failure to attend the Biden meeting was because of a personal clash with President Oscar Arias, not because of ideology. He said that Zelaya's pushing for a constituent assembly to change the Honduran constitution sprung from a fear that his political enemies would pursue him once out of office. He also reported that nothing had come from the Honduran Foreign Minister's meeting with Iranian officials in Mexico and that the ministry was focused on other regions, including on shifting recognition of China from Taipei to Beijing. End Summary.

12. (C) Honduran Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Eduardo Rosales (strictly protect) covered a wide range of issues in a March 31 meeting with the DCM. Rosales had just returned from San Jose, where he attended the Central American meeting with Vice President Biden, which he described as successful, saying that Biden had made it clear that the U.S. was looking for new ways to engage the region. He noted the participation of Salvadoran President-elect Mauricio Funes, adding that Funes had taken a moderate tone in all his statements. Most of Rosales' comments on the meeting concerned Presidents Manuel "Mel" Zelaya and Daniel Ortega's non-participation (Rosales attended with Honduran Vice-President Mejia). Rosales argued that their absence was not based on ideology or association with President Chavez of Venezuela, but rather on personality clashes with Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. Rosales complained that the Costa Ricans had wanted to use Biden's visit to assert leadership in Central America, while doing little to do so in other fora. For example, he said that Arias had not attended the

Central American Integration System (SICA) meeting with other presidents held in Managua the week of March 23. Rosales was thankful that Vice-President Biden had answered a press question about Costa Rican leadership in Central America by saying that the U.S. would seek strong relations with all Central American countries. The DCM said that by skipping the meeting, Zelaya had missed an opportunity to engage the new U.S. administration at a very high level.

13. (C) Rosales also stuck to the theme of personalities when discussing Zelaya's push to have a constituent assembly to reform the constitution (reftel B and C). Zelaya's motivation was again not ideological, he said, but rather sprung for a fear that he would be pursued (and perhaps prosecuted) by his enemies once out of office. The more Zelaya felt cornered, Rosales said, the more dangerous he would become. Rosales argued that it was important Zelaya be given some assurances that he would not be pursued once out of office. He added that Liberal Party stalwart and former president Carlos Flores could be a key player in providing assurances, given that Zelaya trusts him, his close relationship with Liberal party presidential nominee Elvin Santos, and the general respect in which he is held.

14. (C) A cornered Zelaya, Rosales said, could use the current air of political instability and fear over rising crime (in particular skyrocketing murder and kidnapping rates) to encourage leftist populist groups to take to the streets. A worst case scenario would be violent demonstrations leading to deployment of the military to support the police, he added.

15. (C) Rosales said that as far as he knew, nothing had come from Foreign Minister Paty Rodas' February 28 meeting with Iranian officials in Mexico. He said he doubted there would be any movement. The one possibility for an opening would be if Iran offered Honduras support for a large capital or social project in return for some type of relations. But Rosales said that Honduras was aware of Nicaraguan government disappointment with Iranian offers of aid and would be cautious if offered anything. Instead, he said, his instructions were to focus on shifting recognition of China from Taipei to Beijing, maintaining economic relations with Taiwan along the U.S. model; to opening a joint embassy in India that would represent all of Central America; to shifting Honduras' embassy in Egypt to a Gulf state; and to opening an embassy in Moscow (in that priority list).

16. (C) Comment: Rosales is a polished diplomat who was seeking to smooth over friction caused by Zelaya's decision not to attend the San Jose meeting and his push for a constituent assembly. We agree with his argument that Zelaya's is motivated by personality issues vice ideology. But we also believe that Zelaya is driven by a desire to remain at the center of political affairs and that he often does so by causing conflict, making him the main cause of much of the turmoil. Our strategy is to remain as close to Zelaya's government as possible in order to keep it on the constitutional and legal path towards elections in November and the accession of a new administration next January, while working with all major political actors to ensure this result.

LLORENS